

## CHAPTER 3

# Keep Your Work Intellectually Challenging

*First, the subjects we teach are as large and complex as life, so our knowledge of them is always flawed and partial. No matter how we devote ourselves to reading and research, teaching requires a command of content that always eludes our grasp. Second, the students we teach are larger than life and even more complex. To see them clearly and see them whole, and respond to them wisely in the moment, requires a fusion of Freud and Solomon that few of us achieve.*

—Parker J. Palmer, *The Heart of a Teacher*

**I**f you are a new teacher, especially if you are passionate about the intellectual joys of your subject matter, you may have found the realities of teaching a bit shocking. After all, when you decided to become a teacher, you may have imagined a classroom of highly engaged students who would love your discipline as much as you do. It's the dream, right? However, the thrill of landing a teaching job is often soon replaced with a harsh adjustment of your expectations when you see the work that is actually set in front of you: stacks of rules, regulations, and requirements, and students who have little interest or experience in your subject area. And after you have actually figured out how to use your school's attendance system, how to keep the peace during your shift on lunch duty, how to report your grades in the required format, and a thousand other things that have nothing to do with your subject matter, you might begin to wonder if teaching is really an intellectual job after all. I hope you have realized the answer: yes. It's just a different intellectual challenge than many of us anticipate.

At Science Leadership Academy, I teach a twelfth-grade class second semester called Storytelling, which is a hybrid study of master storytellers and creative writing. By the time many students enter twelfth grade, they have mastered the art of argument but have lost their zeal for creating characters, situations, and dialogue along the way. In my class, we go back to finding joy in writing. Usually, I ask students to write about their identity as readers and writers to help me get to know those students I may not have taught in the previous year. While this task helped me to get to know my students deeply, it did nothing to build a community of readers and writers in the class at the beginning of the semester. Since students lacked the necessary trust with each other, they were reluctant to share their writing and give each other feedback. I tried to think of different ways to address this lack of trust. How could I help them see each other as storytellers?

I thought about that question throughout the year as I went about my teaching, reading, and networking. This year when I taught that unit, I made what looked like a split-second decision that changed the way the rest of the semester worked out. The first day, I gave them this assignment: perform a mini story slam, where you tell a story, without notes, for three to five minutes in front of your classmates. The stories ranged from humorous incidents to things my students had never shared with their peers. Their honesty, vulnerability, and willingness to truly listen to each other's stories created an environment where they felt more at ease with sharing their work during the rest of the semester. For my students, the change in the assignment wasn't monumental in terms of action. However, this act of sharing created the necessary trust within our writing community. As a result, that decision I made had a tremendous impact on how the rest of the semester played out in our classroom community.

As teachers, we make game time decisions all the time, and often overlook the complexity of those choices because we are too busy to do otherwise. Good and Brophy (2008) write that teachers face 1,000 decision points per day. While this constant decision making can wear us down, it also gives us a chance to recognize the power that lies within our ability to choose. We hold the ability to redirect the course of learning in our classroom at any given second. When we own our ability to create conditions where learning and joy can live side by side, we take the power back.

The internal dialogue and decision making process our minds go through while teaching reveal our ability to make key decisions that change learning outcomes for our students. We need to honor the complexity that lives in the art of teaching. These seemingly simple decisions are often based on weighing complex factors that make up our work as teachers, including temperament of certain students, the time of the year, time allotted for this unit, size of the class, and past experiences with

these specific groups of students. This intellectual challenge trumps any paper I wrote on Hegel's dialectical movement in college. It's also what keeps me coming back to the classroom year after year.

## The Importance of Naming Our Complexity

In many ways, it's hard to imagine a field that requires the mix of intellect, passion, and game-time decisions that teaching does. Ron Brandt characterized teachers as the "managers of complexity" (1986, 5), and if we reflect on our daily work of delivering and differentiating a lesson to our students, it seems like an apt label. The key is we take this swirl of information and take action. As the Concordia University "Teacher Education Conceptual Framework" articulates:

The skills needed to manage complexity often boil down to decision making. The complexities of instruction, teacher-student relations, student-student relation, parental interactions, and administrative expectations all come to bear upon the daily actions of the teacher, and those complexities require appropriate decision making.

While all the complexities of decision making seem burdensome, the findings of Rosabeth Moss Kanter, professor at Harvard Business School, suggests that meeting these challenges gives us an opportunity for happiness. In writing her book *Evolve! Succeeding in the Digital Culture of Tomorrow* (2001), she discovered:

The happiest people I know are dedicated to dealing with the most difficult problems. Turning around inner city schools. Finding solutions to homelessness or unsafe drinking water. Supporting children with terminal illnesses. They face the seemingly worst of the world with a conviction that they can do something about it and serve others. (2013)

Standing up in front of thirty-three sleepy teenagers on Monday morning and exalting the beauty of Shakespeare (or linear equations, chemical reactions, or mercantilism) takes some serious guts. Getting a student who reads significantly below his grade level to not only comprehend *The Odyssey* but also connect the pangs of Telemachus who is missing an absent father to his own life is a worthy challenge. You don't think about the complex factors at work or all of the cognitive decisions in those early morning epiphanies. Instead, you see beauty, joy, challenge, and purpose in any of those concepts that you teach, and you hope to ignite the same

passion in your students. But recognizing the complexity of what we do each day can be a way to energize and empower our work.

Our sense of fulfillment as teachers begins and ends with knowing that we are tackling one of the most pressing questions of our time: How do we prepare our students to tackle the complex challenges our world faces? Our multifarious work of teaching, trying to find new ways to reach our students, continues to provide us with joy and a sense of accomplishment.

## How Do We Maintain Our Motivation?

I am sure you have had those moments in your classroom where your students are completely engaged in the process of learning, where magic happens in surprising ways. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi identifies this immersion in a task as “flow,” which he describes as “a sense of merging with the activity” (2000). It’s what we imagine will happen when we enter our classroom in the first place. However, with the disruptions and demands on our work, it can be hard to maintain. Csikszentmihalyi’s research explains that people can find that flow if they have “very high levels of intrinsic motivation . . . marked by . . . strong interest and involvement in the work” (2000). Our challenge is to figure out how to do this in our daily work of teaching.

According to author Daniel Pink, when dealing with work that is complex and that requires creativity—basically, work like ours—people need three things to feel motivated: autonomy, mastery, and purpose. The more that you strive to bring these three factors under your control, the more likely you are to have the strong internal motivation that you need to drive your work (2009).

### Autonomy

In this time of public scrutiny of education, it’s not uncommon for teachers to feel that they need permission to act in large and small ways: to reframe curriculum to meet the needs of students, to apply for grants for things needed in the classroom, or permission to organize an event for parents in the community. When we don’t get that permission, it chips away at our sense of autonomy. But remember that we are the experts of our craft. While we know to keep an open mind toward ideas from colleagues, parents, and administration, we must not let outside input paralyze our own sound judgment about what is good for our kids.

Another unintended consequence of loss of autonomy is how it makes us stagnant as teachers; it brings the evolution of our teaching practice to a disheartening

halt. Instead of moving forward on challenges that we can address, we may find ourselves doing nothing at all. This is probably the worst consequence of disempowerment of educators in our times.

Without autonomy, work can feel like nothing more than drudgery. As Csikszentmihalyi explains, “when we feel that we are investing attention in a task against our will, it is as if our psychic energy is being wasted. Instead of helping us to reach our own goals, it is called upon to make someone else’s dream come true” (2008, 160). Often, the struggle for autonomy isn’t always based on external factors or permissions. Often, our doubts hold us back from taking our own ideas seriously and implementing them. If you struggle with these doubts, consider these questions:

- ◆ When have you felt that you could act autonomously in your work in the past school year?
- ◆ When have you felt that you needed permission from others?
- ◆ When did your hesitation keep you from seizing a great opportunity for your students?

### Mastery

In our work, mastery does not mean perfection: we are not programming droids, but rather we play an essential role in shaping the learning lives of young people. However, it does mean we must continue the deliberate act of reflection on our actions and relentlessly pursue improvement. We will never reach a fulfilling end point in our work because our craft will continue to evolve. Each year, we meet a new set of students who will teach us things as well. Sarah Brown Wessling, 2010 National Teacher of the Year, put it best, “I have horrible lessons too. Of course I do. . . . Every variety of failure and misstep: I’ve done it. But I’m not afraid of mistakes and I’m not ashamed of them. I learn and tweak and grow and get better, not because I was ever perfect to begin with, but because I am compelled to get it right . . . eventually” (2013). In this constant pursuit, we hone our art. As you begin the year, you may want to consider these questions, discuss them with your colleagues, and even set a few goals as a way to keep them on your radar throughout your daily life of teaching:

- ◆ What am I trying to master this year? How am I challenging myself?
- ◆ What will make me feel stronger for having accomplished this year?
- ◆ How am I finding intellectual joy in the work that I am doing this year?

## Purpose

Unlike other careers where a worker might wonder how selling her quota of widgets makes the world a better place, we already know. It's one of the best parts of being a teacher. We have a clear purpose. When we stay at school past 7 pm on a Friday night, we don't wonder why we are doing the work. We understand that the work we do matters because we see the future problem-solvers, tinkers, and innovators of our country each day in our classroom. We understand our problems—war, poverty, and climate change—are in the hands of our students and they will have the power to change the course of our fate as humanity. We work to prepare them to meet that challenge.

- ♦ What is the work, the goal, the project, or the student that gives you purpose?
- ♦ When have you not been able to keep purpose at the forefront of your work with students?
- ♦ At what point in the day/year is your purpose crystal clear to you? When is it hard to grasp?

When we view our work through the lenses of gaining autonomy, working toward mastery, and recognizing the true purpose of our work, we jump-start our own intrinsic motivation and open ourselves to master the intellectual challenges that we will face continuously in our daily work.

## Autonomy, Mastery, and Purpose in Action

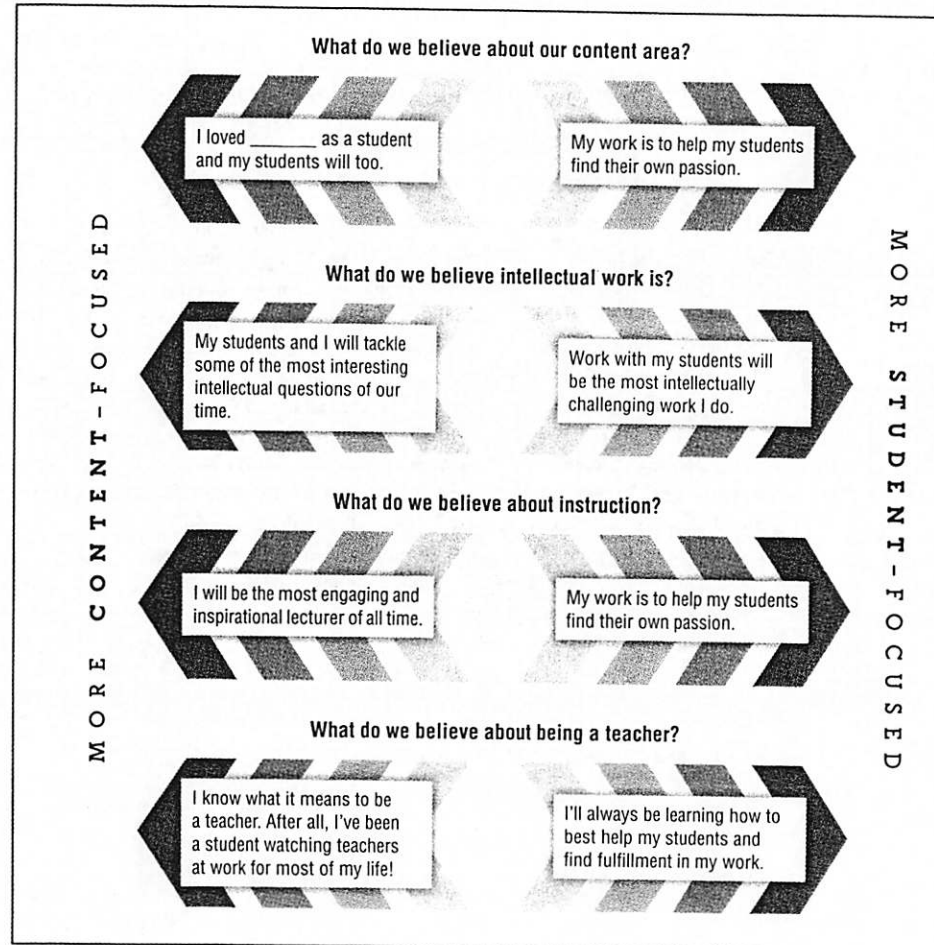
On the night before grades are due, or the day that you have cafeteria duty, it might be difficult to remember that, ultimately, we have the power to make our work intellectually challenging, but that responsibility always rests with us. How can we find intellectual joy in our work?

## Reframe Our Work

The first step we can take in valuing the intellectual challenges in our work is changing our perspective. It may mean shifting our vision of intellectual work from the content-specific work we might have done as undergrads to the challenging, student-focused work that is at the heart of our profession—without ever losing our love of our content areas. The name of the game is balance—the managing of

constant tensions between content and student-driven pedagogical decisions (Figure 3-1). Feeling empowered to balance these tensions in your classroom makes us better teachers in the end.

Figure 3-1 What do we believe?





In each of these shifts, the mind pivots from individual responsibility to a collaborative stance on a teacher's practice. These new shifts involve seeing a classroom as a complex network of stakeholders—teacher, students, parents, administration, and community members—all who want to see your students succeed. A teacher can leverage these connections to solve complex problems facing the school community. Embracing this challenge is not only an incredible intellectual challenge, it is also an emotional and ethical challenge that emphasizes the purpose of your work and your own autonomy.

## Create Our Own Curriculum

In teaching, we are asked to teach vast amounts of content and life-long skills and habits our students will need to become active citizens and members of our society. This task is no easy one. In a world history class, it could mean uncovering the human history from prehistoric times to present day. In math and science classes, basic concepts of things that make up the universe and our bodies are discovered. We simply cannot manage this task without having a good grasp of what we're teaching, why we're teaching it, and what sequence we will follow. Framing your curriculum in some ways is like rolling out a vision and a mission for a group of talented people and getting them onboard so that you can begin meaningful work.

Many teachers are daunted by the task of writing curriculum and feel like it is an arduous task in addition to time-consuming work such as grading, preparing lessons, and communicating with students and parents. Often times, teachers are handed prepackaged curriculum when they begin work in a new school. It can be tempting to rely on curriculum that has been developed by "experts"—both because of the persuasive marketing on those products and the hope of saving some precious time. However, when we decide to use a prewritten curriculum, we are not only letting go of our autonomy and turning down an authentic intellectual challenge, we are also short-changing our students.

**Prepackaged curriculum assumes that all of your students are identical learners.** Because you spend time at the beginning of the year learning about the interests, strengths, and home lives of your students, you know that you're not teaching a homogeneous caricature of a student in your class. Zaria has a deep interest and knowledge of graphic novels, while Maria would have a hard time getting through a single one. While some ready-made curriculum claims to include differentiation, it is often lacking in substance. Publishers of curriculum assume that all students learn the same way and have the same interests, but you know that this just isn't

true. Your students would benefit much more from having you tailor their learning goals, plans, and assessment to match their individual interests and strengths.

**Prepackaged curriculum does not address students' needs.** It assumes that you can put a student in front of a reading program or learn remedial math for a couple of hours and spack a love for either reading or solving problems.

**Prepackaged curriculum isn't necessarily written or reviewed by experts.** Many textbook programs label themselves as research-based and even hire high-profile authors. Educational researcher and author Peter Dewitz has interviewed people who make textbooks—authors, publishers, and editors—and he has found that the process of making prepackaged curriculum does not inspire confidence in the programs:

The lessons, workbooks, and assessment tools are largely subcontracted to development houses. The authors of the program rarely review any of this work; . . . much has to be written by many different people, with little time for review by the authors of the program. . . . Ultimately there is the compromise between what the research recommends and what the educational marketplace demands. (Dewitz and Wolskec 2012, 9–10)

**Prepackaged curriculum doesn't prepare students for real-world challenges.** As Daniels and Zemelman point out in *Subjects Matter*, textbooks are "exceedingly hard to read" (2004, 40)—long, dry, and loaded with facts and terminology unlike any form of text that students are likely to encounter in the outside world. When we rely on the textbook as the main source of knowledge, "We virtually pretend that textbooks aren't reference books at all—but rather some strange hybrid text form: long, fact-packed stories that a person can read day in and day out, memorizing with fascination, and passing statewide tests upon completion" (40–41).

Curriculum planning for your students is like planning meals for your family. A home-made meal with quality ingredients always trumps fast food, and it presents new and interesting intellectual challenges for the chef.

There is no denying it: creating student-centered, culturally-relevant, and engaging curriculum for your students is no small task, but is more rewarding to you and your students than faithfully following a prepackaged program. Initially, it can be more work, but the rewards are bigger too. Will every unit you plan be perfect? No, but you may learn more from the units that don't fully work for your students than the ones that do. Kira Baker-Doyle worked with a group of teachers

## Read Widely in Your Profession

Constantly challenging yourself with new ideas and insights can help you look at your own work with fresh eyes and can give you ideas that will help you work toward mastery in your classroom. You might be saying to yourself, who has time for all this? I can barely get through the student work I take home every night and bring back ungraded the next day. It's true that reading in your fields—both your content area and in the field of education—can take time. However, an up-to-date knowledge of best practice in your profession can help you to do your best work and make you feel connected and energized. A few places to get started:

### Professional books

Professional books have the power to make us feel less alone on our journey toward improving our practice. By reading these books, I have personally found a new way to reclaiming my work with students, get practical advice on classroom challenges, and set new goals for the future. If you're still learning about the range of voices in the professional book world, see the bibliography at the end of this book for a variety of excellent resources.

### Journals

Every subject area professional organization offers a journal for subscription to its members. Oftentimes, these journal subscriptions are offered as part of the organization's membership. Take advantage and look through them when you get a chance—they often include cutting-edge research and responses to current issues in the field. Sometimes, I will search the archives of journals available to me online before planning a unit as I often find that journal articles are well researched and offer a host of lesson planning ideas. You may even find a topic that will help you connect to and collaborate with other professionals if you take a moment to glance at the latest issue from a journal in your subject area. I find great ideas for the classroom in the poetry, off the shelves, and teacher-to-teacher sections in the *English Journal* from the National Council of Teachers of English.

### Blogs

While journals may come quarterly or monthly from your professional organizations, subject area blogs and Google Plus communities are updated around the clock. I subscribe to and read relevant blogs from thought leaders in my subject area and will often get a new idea from following their class' work online. Not sure what to do for National Poetry Month? Want to find a new way to celebrate Pi Day

from Upper Dublin High School to help them create their own curriculum and her reflections show the power of a group of teachers coming together to build a curriculum that meets the needs of their students.

At Upper Dublin High School we have a collaborative professional development group called the Upper Dublin-Arcadia Teacher Collaborative (UDATC). We meet every week to talk about our teaching, share experiments, and explore new ideas. What makes us unique is that we are not just Upper Dublin teachers—we are student teachers, faculty from Arcadia, former students, and school leaders. We bring many different perspectives to the work, which generates new ways of thinking and builds respect for others' situations or beliefs. We do share certain guiding principles as a group—that we are learners with our students, that the students are at the center, and that we need to connect, learn, and share experiences with the world at large. These ideas guide us and make us ask questions about our work, ultimately helping us to take risks and innovate in a sustainable way. As one teacher put it, "If you fail alone it feels like failure and you want to give up, but if you try something and fail with UDATC, it just makes you think, 'what can I do differently next time?'"

**But what if I am required to use prepackaged curriculum?** If you find yourself in the position that you are required to use prepackaged curriculum, consider how to balance it by incorporating the authentic inquiry that your students bring to your classroom. For example:

- In an Environmental Science class, invite your local government representative to answer questions prepared by your students regarding how local policy is impacting local ecology.
- In a Statistics class, see if your students can present their analysis of local use of public spaces to city/town planners in your area.
- In an American government class, have your students develop students' Bill of Rights for your class, school, or district.

These are just a few simple ideas to add depth and inquiry to a curriculum that you are handed, where you're trying to bring authentic student choices and inquiry to the classroom.

(March 14th)? Turn to a blog run by an expert subject area teacher and take away applicable insights for your practice. Be sure to leave comments and engage the blogger, it helps them keep going!

Because new blogs pop up every day, any list of blogs that I include in this book will be out-of-date before long.

Once you start reading blogs regularly, you'll notice comments and links that will lead you to new voices. If you're following people in your fields on Twitter, you will also find links to blogs.

## Videos

Easy access to video has transformed our profession in the last few years. Teachers can easily capture their work in the classroom and review it for personal and professional growth. Organizations such as Teaching Channel and National Board for Professional Teaching Standards are using video to not only reflect on teaching practice but also improve teacher performance in the classroom. You can find many high-quality videos on the web to peek a glance at another colleague's classroom nearby or across the country.

## Do the Reading You Enjoy

When strapped for time and feeling inundated with the amount of work you're doing for your classes, the thought of just enjoying the Sunday *New York Times* or the latest collection of short stories by your favorite author can feel a bit too much. I know teachers who wait for summer to really dive into books that they save all year long. This type of self-sacrifice is not only unfair but it may even be hurting your practice as a teacher.

When you allow yourself the pleasure and time to read the things that nourish your reading life, you can bring those connections into your classroom. While scanning the front page of the *New York Times*, I came across a story called "The Stories That Bind Us" and even though I didn't have time to check it then, the same story popped up in my Twitter feed hours later. It felt like the story was following me throughout the day. Eventually, when I finally read it, I ended up using it for my Storytelling class, and it became a powerful experience for our learning community that would not have happened if I didn't take the time to do the reading that nourishes my teaching soul.

It is the very things that we think we don't have time for that may just sustain us through the rough patches of the year. Think about the last time you turned down an invite to coffee with a friend, seeing a concert, or going to the movies. These very things may provide you with the inspiration to find ideas and a neces-

sary mental break from the rigors of the classroom. After all, you're providing the inspiration for so many of your students; you need to find a way to get inspired by the intellectual pleasures, art, ideas, and movements of our time.

## Write for Others in Your Field

By writing about your work, your discoveries, and your insights, you also get a chance to reflect on your own practice and you get to keep a record of the work you're striving to do with your students. This reflection goes beyond mere strides toward personal improvements, it provides our society an intimate look into the complexity of teaching, and your openness allows others to have a deeper understanding of the educational challenges of our time. There are journals, blogs, and newspaper sites that love to hear from teachers in the classroom. You can give your unique perspective of how lofty policies are actually impacting the work you're doing with your students. Your point of view is important for policy makers, politicians, and parents to see and know.

Professional writing also allows you to gain a wider audience, find collaborators, and hear back from other educators on your practice. This feedback not only helps you improve your practice, but it can provide you with the encouragement to keep trying new ideas in a climate of feeling like we're under siege.

Jose Vilson sees writing about our work as a way to change public perceptions of teaching.

### Jose Vilson

Math Teacher  
Washington Heights, New York



Profile

Speaking up and out and having people actually listen is a talent, and one I constantly have to build. Writing professionally gives me the platform to say things to an audience who otherwise wouldn't seek this truth.

... continues



(Jose Vilson, *continued*)

Being a teacher writer falls in line with this too because seldom does major media reach out to teachers to talk about the context in which we work. For instance, teachers might get interviewed about a lesson plan or perhaps an event that happened at their school, but rarely do they get asked how to improve working conditions or how budget cuts affect their profession. America loves its local teachers, but only as instructor to their child, not as people who have equal parts passion and professionalism in mind for their craft.

For some reason, current teachers don't get the recognition for their expertise that other professions do. Writing about these experiences positions me (and teacher writers like me) into a slot that puts us on par with so-called education experts. At first, when I started writing, it was merely a reflective tool, a way to tell a few of my friends how I felt at work, and the sorts of things they ought to think about if they wanted to become teachers. The reflection is still there, but now my writing has made me more conscious of who I'm speaking to, people who don't necessarily get it or want to get it. How do I use my gifts to speak for teachers with similar experiences in the classroom to people who may or may not believe what we do about education?

It's amazing, really.

## Use Action Research

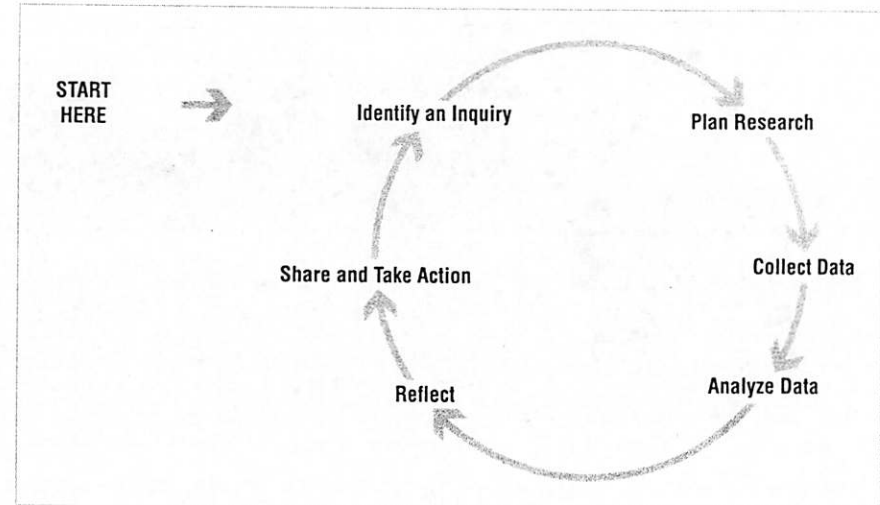
Action research is the meeting point between classroom practice and theoretical paradigm housed in academia. When teachers take part in action research or teacher research, they rediscover their role as a learner in the process and begin to wonder how they can help their students find the same passion for inquiry, research, and reflection. It can help practitioners find their passion toward improving practice while creating new knowledge around teaching practices. Charlotte Danielson, an internationally recognized expert in the field of teacher evaluation, considers action research to be one of the tools of teachers who have reached a distinguished level of growth and professional development (1996).

On a practical level, action research is a way of problem-solving by applying research to real-world situations with the help of a learning community. McCutcheon and Jung provide the following definition for action research:

Systematic inquiry that is collective, collaborative, self-reflective, critical, and undertaken by the participants of the inquiry. The goals of such research are the understanding of practice and the articulation of rationale or philosophy of practice in order to improve practice. (1990, 148)

Action research can often be recursive and it may look like this; when you begin you will start with an inquiry and plan research to tackle this inquiry (Figure 3-2).

Figure 3-2 The cycle of action research



Kemmis and McTaggart focus on the social justice aspect, describing action research as:

... [a] form of collective, self-reflective inquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social or educational practices, as well as their understandings of the practices and the situations in which these practices are carried out. Groups of participants can be teachers, students, principals, parents, and other community members—any group with a shared concern. The approach is only action research when it is collaborative, though it is important to realize that the action research of the group is



achieved through the critically examined action of the individual group members. (1982, 15)

At the heart of action research are the principles of

- Working as part of a learning community.
- Applying research to real classrooms.
- Seeing teachers as the experts and honoring their findings.
- Adhering to the idea that there are many valid forms of data in teacher research (e.g., student responses, journals, focus groups, and classroom observations).
- Seeing practitioners/researchers as both being on the inside and outside of the scope of the research.

A teacher's action research not only helps to improve her practice but also broadens the knowledge base for teaching and learning.

## Profile



**Jennifer Isgitt**

High School English Teacher  
Fort Worth, Texas

Right now one of my friends and I are conducting action research on classroom discussion, specifically Harkness classroom discussion. Our biggest question is about how to adapt this method for the large class sizes that we encounter in public education. Most schools that use this method are small private schools with small class sizes, and so we have been working to figure out how to make it more effective.

Also, my friend teaches calculus, so this is a cross-disciplinary effort.

We have learned some good ways to split the class into small groups and developed some techniques and handouts for evaluating the discussion. We have developed handouts and assessment for the students who are not part of a discussion on a given day (they have a formal observation of the discussion to complete).

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(Jennifer Isgitt, continued)

Action research definitely shapes my practice in the sense that I feel free to take the risk to experiment. I am very open with students about what I am doing. I tell them that I am trying something and then I ask for their feedback on how a particular practice is working. I have changed the discussion forms several times: a couple of times for the transcript form I use, and probably four or five times for the observation form I use.

Advice: Don't be afraid to try things. Let students have input into what you are doing. Explain to them that you are trying to answer a question about their learning and let them make suggestions about what would be best. Don't feel obligated to take a grade on everything. Some things won't work that well, and you shouldn't let the students suffer for that. In fact, I like to try several things before I settle on something to formally assess. Work with colleagues and share with them what you are doing. Share what you have learned with other educators!



The truth of the matter is, doing all of the things mentioned in this chapter *is more work*, at least initially, but it is the work that makes teaching an intellectual challenge, and that will give you the motivation to do your best work. Don't sell yourself short and take the intellectual fulfillment out of your job. You entered the classroom again because you love learning, so keep learning alongside your students: take on new inquiries, investigations, and new lenses. The rewards of this work will be paid with your students' success and engagement.

Presidential Medal of Freedom recipient John W. Gardner's comment about society, below, might be equally fitting for the field of education and our own classrooms:

"[S]ociety is not like a machine that is created at some point in time and then maintained with a minimum of effort; a society is being continuously re-created, for good or ill, by its members. This will strike some as a burdensome responsibility, but it will summon others to greatness." (1995)